

## **SYMPOSIUM XI**

### **“Potential Vulnerabilities in Contemporary Times”**

Vulnerability as a concept in Psychology has been much sought in terms of clinical reception and sociocultural situatedness. Vulnerability is often associated with those who are living at the margins and those living with a disadvantage. And therefore it is often seen as a negative concept. But positive and negative are not mutually exclusive domains. The division between outer-inner, social-personal is a blurred one. The idea of relative spacing and personal spacing has undergone a change beyond expectations. The guidelines which once made me experience 'cohesiveness' have changed today. As psychologists it is essential that we understand how one develops resilience towards one's own vulnerability.

Now the fundamental questions that arise are if vulnerability is embedded in one's psyche? Is it a vulnerable time or is it unfolding a person in multiple ways/positions/structures that makes a person vulnerable? As practitioners we cannot get away from the rhetoric of vulnerability. Some of the existing phenomena, though common, but recurring, leaves a residual influence. The papers included in the symposium through narratives of teachers, caregivers, online dating app users try to delve deep into human psyche to understand the vulnerability of the present times. The idea is not to frighten us but the idea is to make us realize how we are redefining ourselves in the existing contexts. As practitioners of psychology, we should look for vulnerability in those spaces which we take for granted and that is exactly what this symposium proposes to do.

## Abstract 1:

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### Experiences of Vulnerabilities around Motherhood

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The idea of 'womanhood' has been entwined with 'motherhood' to such an extent that the image of complete woman seems to make sense only when one follows the other. Several said and unsaid phrases have been prominent catalysts, shaping the female psyche vis a vis how and what meaning she ascribes to her Being. Being an inhabitant of Delhi, passing through different corners of the city cannot be completed without witnessing the presence of fertility clinics/hospitals. There are counselling cells in many of the infertility/fertility centres, who offer hand holding the patient during the course of their treatment. Yet the loss of meaning, and the 'latent pain' suffered by those who either fail to achieve parenthood or are in the process often get missed by the medicalizing approach of the practitioners. The present Study precisely ventured into blurred psychic spaces within the females who are labelled as 'infertile' and the challenges experienced while negotiating their meaning *inside* and *outside*. After selecting the clinic, the researcher volunteered free counselling sessions for their female patients enrolled there for treatment. Out of several clients, fifteen were selected with due consent for the purpose of this study. Ethnographic mode of enquiry became a comfortable pitch for building trust between the client and the counsellor. The data pooling contained insights culled from on and off the recordings, yet shared by the client. Handling the long sessions of listening the 'pain' and the client's tussle coming in terms with it had been the most vulnerable part of the study. Being a female herself, married and without children, moments of *shared pain* encountered by the researcher enabled (and sometimes disabled perhaps) in understanding the nuances of the process of meaninglessness. The narratives were analyzed in the light of phenomenological perspectives. The insights that emerged from the analyses dealt with the intra-psychic conflicts between 'Ought' and 'being' dominant in the experience of void. The analysis unveiled the psychic processes witnessed in the absence of meaning which with deeper probe highlighted the prevalence of *consensual being*. The data reveals the lived and unlived paradoxes within the female sample which resonates with the deeper impacts of the contemporary discourses around being fertile.

## **Abstract 2:**

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### **Revisiting the Prevalent Notions of Women Empowerment**

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Recent academic and popular literature proliferates the imagery of the ‘empowered woman’ as an alternative to gender based inequalities. This ‘empowered’ woman embodies the life of structured-formal employment, celebrated individualistically-oriented womanhood, greater spaces for ‘gender equality’ and acts of reclaiming rights over the physical body. She is constructed as the marker of ‘liberation’ against the ‘suppressed’ existence of women in the yesteryears. These constructs are stark in the popular visuals circulated by the contemporary culture and have in myriad ways permeated the consciousness of Indian women. At a psychological level, the image of ‘empowered woman’ has indeed strengthened the binaries of ‘working women’ and ‘housewives’, ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’, and the feminist claims and sexist biases. These categories, though functional, have created further hierarchies within images of womanhood. There is little space for reflection on personhood as a shared entity, embedded within a matrix of social influences. The emphasis is more on the individual as an agentic being, creating single-handedly their own realities. The paper through empirical data articulates the understandings, dilemmas and challenges in making of ‘woman’ and her ‘empowerment’ in contemporary times. Data was gathered through multiple interviews of upper middle class women, professionals and non-professional, within the age range of 35-55 years, residing in Delhi. Tools used were focus group discussions using films as vignettes, in depth interviews and candid remarks outside the formal data gathering space. Discourse Analysis within the critical psychology paradigm was adopted as the approach for data analysis. Major themes suggest the lived ambivalence of the ‘empowered’ ideal, marked by a sense of displacement from conventional woman roles, loss of collective catharsis, silence around vulnerable spaces and hyperorality as a way of coping. Finally, the paper critiques the notion of ‘women empowerment’ as a blanket response to gender differences and inequalities.

*Keywords:* gender, empowerment, Discourse Analysis,

### **Abstract 3:**

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**(Un) Making of a Teacher: Challenges around the Teaching-Learning space in urban cities.**

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Twenty First century has witnessed a paradigmatic shift in the educational spaces to support learner centric education. For catering to the needs of the culturally, linguistically and socio-economically diverse groups of learners, multiplicity of the strategies, pedagogies and the medium of instructions becomes a necessity for any kind of learning to take place. The measure of diligence and conscientiousness it implies frames a sacrosanct picture of the profession of teaching. However the “experiencer” within the teacher remains hidden under the façade. The present study tried to understand the challenges and concerns of teachers while navigating through the role of being an “educator” in the “profession” of teaching. For this purpose narratives from twenty five school teachers (fifteen from Kendriya Vidyalaya and ten from a private school) were collected and analyzed using Thematic Analysis Technique. The sample was selected using snowball sampling technique and consisted of teachers from primary, middle and secondary departments. The sample was so divided because the emotional labour for the three groups of teachers would be considerably different. It was found that the Government schools, although begun with the aim of providing “literacy to all” are now saddled with an unmatched teacher student ratio which results in an added emotional burden for the teachers, while the private school teachers work with a brand oriented consciousness, where imparting knowledge is not the only goal but the entire responsibility for the child development lies on the shoulders of a teacher. However a wholehearted effort for providing quality education remains overlooked. Furthermore, any unforeseen accidents happening in the school premises results in the penalization of the school and the teachers. Such penalization demoralizes them, further shifting the focus from education to auxiliary services and duties. The study tries to center the difficulties of teacherhood in these contexts and attempts to deconstruct our deep seated notions about the profession of teaching.

*Key words:* learner-centric, educational spaces, quality education, emotional burden, teacherhood.

**Abstract 4:**

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**Online Dating: Redefining Relationships**

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An interesting intersection of modern technology and contemporary culture has provided people the freedom to choose one's own romantic partner, by creating personalized and customized spaces in the online world. While promising to find one's "true love", the dating applications have been used for engaging in all forms of partnerships such as hook ups, one night stands to long term relationships. Concealed and undisclosed, the dating application continues to have number of users, apparently seeking love and companionship. At the same time, users are constantly evaluating potential partners based on attractiveness of their photos and profiles, leading to a typical market oriented mindset. Having innumerable choices available at one's fingertips may also have the effect of undermining the satisfaction of interaction and eventual relationship with one person. In light of the above scenario, the deconstruction of "love" has assumed significance. The present study aims to understand the meaning and experience of intimacy and romance for the users of the online dating application. For this purpose, 20 Tinder (the popular mobile dating application) users, 10 males and 10 females from the age group of 18 to 25 were selected using snowball sampling technique. Semi structured interviews were conducted and data was analyzed thematically. Suggestive finding indicates a trend where fulfillment of need for intimacy alongside the consumerist undercurrents of the society seems to redefine romantic relationships, in and emerging from these virtual spaces. A culture which is still not open to admit loneliness experienced at individual and societal level, is witnessing a dilemma vis-a-vis prevalence of seeking intimate partnership.

*Keywords:* online dating, relationship, intimacy, love, choices.

**Abstract 5:**

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***“Being For” and “Being With”: An Interminable Journey of Parkinson’s Caregivers***

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Caregiving has been usually understood in terms of economic burden and quality of life, however little has been done to understand the intricacies and perplexities which become an inevitable constituent of a caregiver’s life. Elements like emergence and experience of patienthood in the caregiver, the blurring of identity as an individual, or the experience of alienation in the known structures of one’s family, have been overlooked. Current study looks into the caregiving process of those dealing with family members suffering from Parkinson’s disease, with the changing social milieu in India, that coexists and conflicts with the constantly prescribed cultural scripts of tradition. For this purpose, in-depth personal narratives of eight female informal caregivers was gathered. The data was analyzed using Existential Phenomenology, focusing on the existential givens of temporality, spatiality, historicity, co-existence, bodyhood, and mortality. Few themes which emerged were, Experience of timelessness, Shouldering Responsibilities, and Dissonance between cultural and personal narrative, shedding light on their moral dilemmas, a sense of estrangement from self, relational alienation reinforced by the culture and a deeper sense of inconsistency, choicelessness and meaninglessness. These findings can be utilized for developing an intervention model for providing comprehensive care to the caregivers, which relooks at, as well as utilizes their sense of meaning-making in enhancement of their mental health

*Keywords:* Parkinson’s disease, Existential Phenomenology, Narratives, Cultural scripts, Caregiving.

**Abstract 6:**

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**Title: Spotting the myopic lover: Exploring the role of sight in contemporary notion of romance**

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The skewed emphasis on the sight of the lover or ‘the love’ has proliferated the visuals around which intimacy is constructed in popular discourses, replacing our other senses to mostly vision. The matrix of consumerist culture which redeems intimacy as a personal choice has also packed it in a much approachable and quantifiable experience, and such immediate gratification has left limited space for relishing and absorbing what one already has. Narratives of four couples of which, either one of the two partners is visually impaired, or both are visually impaired, or both are sighted were collected in an attempt to understand and explore modality of their intimacy with respect to each other and themselves. The ‘privilege’ to be able to see the nonverbal aspects of intimate relationships is being questioned with the essence of sensing one’s joy and pain in the absence of the visual cues. The partners who acknowledge intimacy as a space for exploring one’s own unheard, unseen and untouched facets were able to bond with their partner’s sense of understanding and numbness. The paper through the life history method attempts to sketch a critique of the overarching role of sight in defining modern day romance.

*Keywords:* Sight, Nonverbal communication, Intimacy, Blindness

**DETAILS OF PARTICIPANTS FOR THE SYMPOSIUM**

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